



PSC NEWS

Missouri Public Service Commission

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FY-04-94

PSC ISSUES WARNING TO TELEPHONE CUSTOMERS CALLING IRAQ

Jefferson City (November 20, 2003)---The Missouri Public Service Commission has issued a warning to telephone customers calling to loved ones in Iraq that they may be being billed at a much higher per minute rate than they signed up for when making those calls.

"We have been investigating this since we were contacted by Lt. Governor Joe Maxwell's office," stated Commission Chairman Steve Gaw. "Our investigation so far has revealed that even though a long distance carrier may be advertising a certain per minute long distance rate, the customer may in fact be paying a much higher per minute rate to call a loved one in the military stationed in Iraq," stated Gaw. "Families of servicemen and women in Iraq already face enough stress and worry," added Gaw, "without having to deal with telephone charges that are much higher than they expected."

Lt. Governor Maxwell said he is deeply concerned about the possible higher rate charges since military families are already burdened with additional financial sacrifices while loved ones are away in Iraq. "I appreciate the quick coordination between the Public Service Commission and my office on this urgent matter," Maxwell said.

The issue apparently involves calls to Iraq to country code numbers beginning with 881 or 882. It appears these calls are going through a global satellite system, and therefore, the charge may be at a much higher per minute rate than the calling party expects. "We have received information about a consumer who believed an international call rate of less than a \$1.00 a minute was being provided for calls to Iraq. But when the bill arrived, the consumer was actually charged nearly \$5.00 a minute for calls to military personnel in Iraq," stated Gaw.

"The Commission wants consumers to be aware of this and ask questions before they sign up for any long distance plan to Iraq or any type of international long distance calling," stated Gaw. "In addition, all long distance carriers should make this information available to consumers before they make their decision. Consumers shouldn't have to call a carrier AFTER they receive a bill to get the information."

The Commission is asking consumers who believe that they have been misbilled for these international calls to contact the Missouri Public Service Commission's Consumer Services Department at 1-800-392-4211. "All information gathered in our investigation will be forwarded to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and Missouri Commission Staff will look into any matters involving possible violations of state regulatory requirements," stated Gaw.